The Ministry sent of God by the Church.

A SERMON

PREACHED TO A

Congregation of the Presbyterian Churches

IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY,

February 26, 1852.

BY E. D. MAC MASTER.

LOUISVILLE:

HULL & BROTHER, FOURTH STREET.

1852.

Louisville, February 27, 1852.

Reverend and Dear Sir:

After expressing our thanks to you for the Sermon which you were kind enough to preach at our request last evening, and our great satisfaction with the discourse itself, we take the liberty of asking a copy of it for publication.

We cannot doubt, that, with the divine blessing, much good will result from laying before the churches in a more permanent form, accessible to all, the timely, solemn and important truths which it sets forth.

We are, with great respect and esteem,

Your friends and brethren,

W. L. BRECKINRIDGE,
EWD. P. HUMPHREY,
L. J. HALSEY,
W. W. HILL,
B. M. HOBSON,
WILLIAM RICHARDSON,
SAMUEL CASSEDAY.

New Albany, February 28, 1852.

Gentlemen:

With my best acknowledgments for your too friendly estimate of my Sermon, expressed in your obliging note of yesterday, I submit to your judgment the question of its publication through the press; which certainly was not in my thoughts. I will send you the manuscript as soon as I can write it out from my notes.

With high regards,

Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

E. D. MAC MASTER.

The Rev. Messrs. Dr. W. L. Breckinridge. Dr. E. P. Humphrey, L. J. Halsey, Dr. W. W. Hill, and others.

A SERMON.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!—ROMANS, x. 13–15.

THIS passage is part of the Apostle's great argument, for the vindication of the Divine conduct, in the casting away of Israel and the bringing of the gentiles into the fellowship of Christ. The fact of this rejection of the Jews and call of the gentiles, he asserts in the preceding chapter, and declares the principle upon which it proceeds. In this tenth chapter he pursues the subject, in an exposition of the administration of the economy of grace, by which salvation is brought to men.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying; In thee shall all nations be blessed. This blessing of Abraham has now, in the fulness of the time, descended on the gentiles through Jesus Christ. The Son of

God has come; the great sacrifice for sin has been offered; redemption has been obtained; and Christ is become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The Righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead:) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee; in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith which we preach. The middle wall of partition between Israel and the gentile world is broken down; both are reconciled unto God in one body by the cross; and now the great salvation must be made known to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed: for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Then follow the words of our text, *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How, then, shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that publish peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Without proposing a full exposition of these words, let us note a few of the main points appropriate to the business which is before us.

I. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL BY A LIVING MINISTRY IS, UNDER THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND LIFE, THE GREAT AGENCY ORDAINED OF GOD FOR MAKING

KNOWN HIS SALVATION TO MEN. *For whosoever shall call &c.*, v. 13, 14.

Brethren, I do not propose an argument to establish this position. It is not argument we want; (for you do not deny the truth, do not doubt it;) but such a practical apprehension of the truth admitted, as shall take hold on the principles of conduct in the minds of men, and move them to the doing of what belongs to them to do in the case. We speak to you, not because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it. We stir up your pure minds, putting you in remembrance of these things, though ye know and be established in the present truth; that the truth may stir you up to a conduct in conformity to the truth. For well has it been said, that "truths, of all others the most awful and interesting, are too often considered as *so* true, that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors."*

We say, then, that, of all the agencies put by God into the hands of men to make known his salvation, the preaching of the gospel by a living ministry is the chief.

I know that there are other agencies and means, which are also of Divine institution. The pen of inspiration has committed to writing the word of God; and the commandment of the Lord Christ is to all men, Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and it is they which testify of me. To every head of a family, too, con-

* Coleridge.

stituted by Divine ordination the priest of his own household, that Prophet, greater than Moses, whom the Lord our God has raised up unto us, has given the charge, These words which I have commanded thee shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. We honor all the institutions of God. But, of all these institutions, we maintain that the preaching of the gospel,—the exposition and application of the Scriptures, by a living ministry, takes the precedence. As usual, so on this point, under the perversion of the lying spirit that speaks by the false prophets of Anti-christian Rome there lies an important truth which is perverted. It will ever be the commendation of the best Christians, as of the Bereans of old, that though apostles were to preach, they will search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so; that they believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world; that were Paul, or an angel from heaven to preach any other gospel to them than that which they have received, he shall be to them Anathema. No man more truly appreciates, or more heartily welcomes, than does the faithful Christian minister, the co-operation of other agencies and means;—the reading of the Scriptures;—a sanctified press; parental instruction; the Sabbath-school, in its own place, and under proper supervision and direction; and whatever else, without trenching upon Divine institutions, can furnish help in the furtherance of the gospel. Yet it is true that there was a church, and a living, teaching ministry in the church, before there were any

Scriptures; that to this church, and through the living ministry,—prophets, apostles, evangelists, inspired for this purpose,—in the church, Christ has delivered the Oracles and ordinances of God, continuing under all dispensations a ministry ordinary, to be the Divinely ordained expositors of those Oracles and administrators of those ordinances, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, to the end of the world. And it remains true to this day, and will so remain till the end of the world, that "the Spirit of God maketh *especially the preaching* of the word an effectual mean of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." Even under the Old Testament, a dispensation in its main scope and intent preparatory to the coming of Christ to bring through his redemption salvation to the world, there was established in the church the ordinance of public teaching by a living ministry. The whole system of sacrifice under the law and the other typical institutes connected with it,—what were they but the preaching of the gospel before by symbol? And, to say nothing of the succession of great prophets, whom from the law till Malachi, God sent to Israel, rising up early and sending; over all the land, from of old even down to the coming of Christ, Moses had in every city them by whom he was preached, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day; as it is written, The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth. And under the New Testament, as all know, God has set in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pas-

tors and teachers, for the work of the ministry.

The reason of this institution of the ministry is apparent in the very nature of things. There may be a man here and there, one in a thousand, or in ten thousand, who from some peculiarity in his character, temperament, or habits of life, may depend on other means,—books for example,—not only for instruction, but for his deepest impressions. But with the vast majority of mankind it will ever be otherwise. The politician does not leave the electors, whom he wishes to gain, to the public documents and the newspapers; but canvasses the public affairs in oral address before the people. The senator does not content himself with printing his bill and calling for the vote upon it; but discusses it with his fellow-senators. The client does not, along with his case, commit to the jury the Statute-Books and the Reports; but retains the tongue of the learned and eloquent advocate. So also is the ministry of the gospel. He who knew what is in man has adapted his institutions to man. The ministry is necessary for the public instruction. Nor for instruction only; but for impression and practical effect. There is in the living voice of the living speaker a power that belongs to no other form of communication. Nor is it by the ignorant and uncultivated only that this power is felt; but by the man of intelligence, of culture, of scientific and philosophical habits of mind. I have somewhere read that when Whitefield was preaching in Philadelphia on occasion of some public charity, he drew from the pockets of a far-famed auditor, who to the character of an eminent philosopher added, as is commonly supposed,

that of one of the coolest-headed and most dispassionate of mortals, quite contrary to the previous intentions of the owner, the whole sum of his deposits there, and along with the money regrets that it was not more. And it is related by Mr. Dugald Stewart, that when the same distinguished preacher first visited Scotland, Dr. Simpson, the celebrated professor of mathematics at Glasgow, attended one of his sermons in the fields; but, not choosing to surrender himself to his power, he could never be persuaded by all the entreaties of his friends to subject himself to the danger of a second experiment. What prodigious effects were produced by that remarkable man upon the multitudes who everywhere thronged to his ministry has sounded down even to our own times. And had the weight of his matter been equal to the singular eloquence of his oratory, who can tell how much deeper and more permanent, as well as salutary, would have been the effects produced? Of course, Whitefield is no examplar for other men;—no examplar of a sober-minded, well-furnished, and able minister of the Divine word, in a well constituted and orderly church;—and as little an examplar in the style of his peculiar eloquence. Nor is it upon the mere art of a human rhetoric that the efficacy of the ministry depends. The greatest of all preachers, Christ only excepted, expressly disclaims it. I came to you, not with excellency of speech; and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. So inferior men,

however deeply they may feel their insufficiency for the work committed to them, may say like Paul; Seeing we have this ministry we faint not. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. Howbeit we speak wisdom; the wisdom of God: For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. We rest upon the Divine institution.

Brethren, of course, you do not misunderstand us. You easily distinguish between the man and the ministry. We boast not ourselves: but we magnify our office. Our Apostle magnifies it. The Scripture magnifies it. Christ himself magnifies it in his own person. For, among the great offices which belong to his Mediatorial character, is this of a preacher of the gospel. The Lord hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. These words Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, read out of the book of the prophet Isaiah, and closed the book and began to say, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. Lo, I come, says he in another place, in the volume of the book it is written of me; I have preached righteousness; I have declared thy salvation in the great congregation.

I have dwelt the longer on this point of the paramount importance of the ministerial office in the gospel economy; because, while its Divine institution is not denied by Christians, there is not a little in the existing condition of things in our own age, going to depreciate the ministry in the minds

of men, and to degrade it from the place of pre-eminence to which God has appointed it, among all, and over all the agencies and means for the preservation and promotion of religion in the world. Now, as in all times, by not a few of those who are professedly aiming to do the work of God, there is a propensity to foist their own inventions into the place of God's institutions. A spirit of exaggeration, too, in respect to the value, intrinsic and relative, of what they themselves are personally occupied with and interested in, is one of the forms in which, even in good men, the perversion of our fallen nature discovers itself; and Satan, the Father of lies, knows how with his characteristic subtilty to work, through these infirmities and errors of men, against the truth and to the hindering of the gospel. I need not particularize in instances. What we this evening desire is, that there may rest upon our spirits a deep impression of the truth that, among all the agencies and means, even such as are of special Divine institution, for making known his salvation to men, pre-eminently God's great ordinance is the preaching of the gospel by a living ministry; that so we may be moved to make earnestly our prayer unto him for such a ministry, for the work of the ministry, the gathering and perfecting of the saints to the end of the world. *How shall they hear without a preacher?*

II. THIS MINISTRY, TO OBTAIN THE ENDS FOR WHICH IT IS APPOINTED, MUST BE SUCH AS IS SENT OF GOD. *How shall they preach, except they be sent?*

This mission from God includes designation to the office of the ministry by Divine authority, and

qualification for the work of the ministry by Divine influence.

A full and particular discussion of the Divine call to the ministry and the qualifications necessary for it, would be beside our present purpose. But altogether appropriate to the business of this evening is a general reference to these topics. For, having, in pursuance of an agreement with many thousands of our brethren all over the country and in other lands, come together into the sanctuary of God, even where his seat is, to unite in asking of him a great boon, it behooves us to consider and know what is the gift, what it implies, and what its magnitude, which we are come to seek at his hand.

As to *a Divine call designating to the office* of the ministry those who shall adventure to undertake it, it is indispensable. Worse than useless as to the end of the ministry, and perilous to the intruder, is his obtrusion of himself, without such Divine warrant, into this holy office. *I have not sent those prophets; yet they ran; I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.* Fearful is the indignation with which the Holy One utters to such his burning rebuke; *Who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? What hast thou to do, to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?* No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God. Even Christ glorified not himself to be made a minister of the sanctuary; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son; to-day I have begotten thee. How much more must sinful men not ad-

venture to take upon them, uncalled of God, this ministry!

The *qualifications* fitting for this ministry are twofold; spiritual gifts appropriate to the work, and sanctifying grace, consecrating these gifts and their possessor to the service of the ministry.

A full enumeration, and much more a particular discussion of these *gifts*, is here quite out of the question. A reference to the leading parts of the work of the ministry will indicate to us the line of direction our inquiries should take; and the Scriptures will furnish to us the desired information.

First of all, then, and above all, the great work of the ministry is to preach the gospel. *To preach the gospel?*—What is that? It is to declare a great mystery;—the mystery that was hidden from ages and generations;—that from the beginning of the world was hid in God; but has been brought to light by the appearing of Christ;—the great mystery of the Divine grace to sinful men, through the incarnation, and death upon the cross, of the Son of God!—A mystery so removed from the natural apprehensions of men;—more strange to many a master in Israel than is the doctrine that a man must be born again;—of which the prophets earnestly inquired and searched what the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, when it spake by them of his sufferings and glory, did signify;—at which the wondering angels of heaven stand amazed!—Who shall declare this high mystery? To preach the gospel is to develop this whole doctrine of Christianity; to exhibit clearly, with precision, adequately, its

several truths; to indicate the interior relations of truth to truth in the general scheme of the Christian doctrine; and to show the bearing of the whole upon the end of all, in making all men to see what is the fellowship of this mystery; not laying always the foundation of the elements, without ever getting above this; but going on to perfection, edifying the body of Christ, until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and unto the principalities and powers in the heavens, by a redeemed church, making known the manifold wisdom of God. To preach the gospel, is for a man so to approve himself unto God, as a Scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, bringing forth out of his treasure things new and old; a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth; adapting its doctrine, its reproof, its correction, its instruction in righteousness, to all the endless diversities in human character and condition found in the household of faith, and among men. It is to preach the word; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine; to instruct the ignorant, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to be patient toward all men; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Who shall undertake this charge? Who shall fulfill this ministry? So to preach the word of God, requires two things;—first, that he who preaches it shall himself know that word; and, second, that he shall be able to make it known as a living, quick-

ening, transforming, life-giving word to others, in all that relates to Christian faith and life. Essentially the office of the ministry is that of the exposition and application of the Scriptures. He is a driveller in the ministry who is not an interpreter of the Oracles of God: and he who knows not how so to minister their truth, as to meet the various and diversified wants of those to whom he preaches, is unskillful in the word of righteousness, and unqualified for the ministry of the word.—For this, two things are indispensable;—the gift of interpretation, and the gift of communication; capacity to discern in the Scriptures the mind of the Spirit, and capacity to expound it as a living word to others.

There are other functions of the ministerial office demanding their appropriate gifts. As a ruler in the house of God, and an administrator of its sacramental institutes, the seals of God's covenant with his people, there should rest upon the minister of the sanctuary the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.—He, too, who is to be to a whole people, statedly, in their worshiping assemblies, their mouth unto God in prayer, it is evident, ought himself, along with the grace, to possess also the gift of prayer; and well were it for the ends of worship, if he who presides over and directs the praises of Zion, were always himself taught by that Spirit that breathed upon the inspired harp of David, "the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel."

Along with spiritual gifts *special grace*, also, con-

secrating these gifts and their possessor to the service of the gospel, is necessary. This is the common sentiment of the whole church. And yet, I think, it may well be questioned whether there is generally any due sense, or even any clear apprehension, of *the character* and *the measure* of that personal piety which is required in the ministry.—What faith in God, what hope, what love; what controlling views of the great salvation, and of God the Saviour, of the nothingness of the transitory, the present, the seen, and the transcendent importance of the unseen and eternal; to sustain men of like passions with others under the self-denial, the privation, the sacrifices which they are called to endure; and to secure on their part against all oppositions from without and from within, an unreserved, full, and constant devotion of their whole being to the work of the ministry;—that looking for no reward on earth, they should be ready to spend and be spent in it, and to joy and rejoice, if they may be offered upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of God's saints!

What think ye, brethren? Is it a light thing that a mortal man should be God's servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; to be a light to the Gentiles and his salvation unto the end of the earth? Can aught qualify, for this, but that of the unction of that Spirit which was given without measure to Christ the Head, the great minister of the sanctuary, shall descend upon every one of us grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ? Although the voice of the Lord himself be heard from out of the sanctuary, saying, Whom shall I send;

and who will go for us?—dare any man respond to the Divine call; Here am I, send me; except one of the seraphim that minister before the Lord enthroned on high in his glory, receiving commandment from Him that sitteth upon the throne, shall come to him, having a live coal taken from off the altar, and lay it upon his mouth, and say, Lo, this hath touched thy lips? The ministry must be such as is sent of God; designated to the office of the ministry by Divine authority, and qualified for its work by Divine influence. *How shall they preach except they be sent?*

III. IN ORDER TO THE PROVIDING OF SUCH A MINISTRY, ALONG WITH THE GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THERE MUST BE A CONCURRENCE BY THE CHURCH, IN THE USE OF ALL APPROPRIATE MEANS. *How shall they preach, except they be sent?*

In this blessed work it has pleased God graciously to unite with himself his church. We are laborers together with God. The means in the use of which the church must thus concur;—what are they? From many things which might be appropriately said, I specify three particulars.

1. First of all, and above all, that which, if it were brought into requisition, all else would speedily follow;—*a general revival of true religion* in the church itself.

I well know that what is to be said on this point it would be, on all accounts, much more becoming your own pastors to say; as I know they have often said it,—are continually saying it to you. But, as the actual preacher of the hour, we must not handle the word of God deceitfully; but seek, in this matter, by manifestation of the truth to com-

mend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. You neither expect nor desire that we should do otherwise.

If then we may say it without offence, and yet as meaning just what we say; the truth is that, with the state of religion which seems generally to exist in the church, not at this particular time only, but habitually, we cannot reasonably expect any adequate supply of candidates for the gospel ministry. We have no right to expect it.

I would not exaggerate the evil. I know that we are very liable to be mistaken in the comparative estimates that we form of the states of religion existing at different times in the church, and that oftentimes our judgment is very different from the judgment of God. I well know that, as there were in Israel seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, when Elijah thought he was left alone; so now, in times of prevalent declension, God has his hidden ones, not a few, who cry unto him day and night continually; and those perhaps, for the most part, of such as do not walk in the high places of Zion and sit in the chief seats of the assemblies of his people. I know that we see not as God seeth, and judge not as he judgeth; and I would not exaggerate the evil.

But, making every qualification that ought to be made, does it not remain true that, in this matter of providing an adequate ministry, the real hindrance is that *the world is set in the heart of the church;* and the spirit of the world has corrupted the spirit of the church?

The forms of the manifestation of this evil spirit are manifold. Two of these forms are widely pre-

valent. The love of money and the love of ostentatious display are vices which, with the power of ruling passions, bear sway over us as a people.—The eager, intense, engrossing pursuit of riches and the luxurious pride and parade of life, if they do not wholly exclude the love of God and drown men in perdition, at least bring temptation and a snare, by which men fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts, and the word of God is hindered.—Such is the course of this world; the church is baptized into the same body and drinks into the same spirit;—and do you wonder that the sons of the church do not offer themselves willingly to the service of the sanctuary? Of what is, almost everywhere and always, the conversation of men professing godliness? Is it that godliness with contentment is great gain? That we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and that, having food and raiment, we should be therewith content? That we are strangers and sojourners on the earth; seeking a better country, the heavenly; and looking for a city that hath foundations whose maker and builder is God;—choosing afflictions with the people of God rather than the pleasures of sin, and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt? Is this the tenor of Christian men's conversation? Or is it money, trade, business, profit and loss, balance-sheets, investments, stocks, houses, lands, equipage, dress, fashion, display? Is it not these things that the Christian father has in his heart, and that he teaches diligently unto his children; that he talks of when he sits in his house, and when he walks by the way, and when he lies

down, and when he rises up, that he binds for a sign upon his hand, and frontlets between his eyes, and writes upon the posts of his house and on his gates? And he wonders that the sons of the church do not offer themselves to the service of the gospel! Will he offer his own sons to this service;—a service which is not honored; but which the avarice and dishonesty of a worldly and carnal age has made one of self-denial, of privation, of penury, of meagre means, and crippled powers for doing the work of the Lord; of trial and discouragement many ways?

Brethren, the plain truth is, we must have a state of religion of a very different type and power from what seems for the most part habitually to exist in the church;—a religion more living, more influential, more controlling, more pervading the whole man and his whole life; going down to the profoundest depths of his moral being, taking hold upon the principles of action within him, moving his whole nature, governing his whole conduct, consecrating him as a temple of the Holy Ghost, and bringing him, soul and body and spirit, as a living sacrifice bound to the horns of the altar of God, a holocaust offering devoted to his service. We then mention first as the means by which the church must seek unto God for this heavenly gift of a sufficient ministry, a general revival of true religion. We say of *true* religion; not of religion which is in word and in tongue only; but which is in deed and in truth. We say *a revival* of true religion;—a revival which shall not spend its force in six weeks of violent and spasmodic agitations, like to those of a corpse under the galvanic battery, and

then to return to quiet and corruption; but a revival which shall be to the church as life from the dead; evincing itself to be of God, by a life-long devotion of its subjects in their whole being to God, as of those who reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you doubt whether, if the church were blessed generally with *such* a revival, there would be any want of candidates for the ministry, sufficient in numbers and of proper qualifications? Without this, do you expect it? Well then we set this down, first of all, as the means by which the church must concur with God in sending to men the preachers of the gospel and ministers of salvation;—a general revival of true religion in the church itself.

2. A second means, it seems to me, is *more directing of attention by Christian parents, and especially by the pastors of the church, specifically to the selection of youth of suitable promise, and the direction of their whole training, religious and scholastic, to this definite end of the ministry.*

I say *selection.* For I am far from believing that it is our duty to tap *every* young man we meet on the shoulder and say to him, "Sir, you ought to be a preacher of the gospel." I do not believe it at all. Rather I believe with a wise steward of a former age, whom his Lord set up on high as a ruler over his household, "that the church hath no power to call any unto the office of the ministry, where the Lord Christ hath not gone before it in the designation of him, by an endowment of spiritual gifts." * I am well aware how difficult

* Owen iv, 330.

it often is to judge beforehand of the probable possession of appropriate qualifications; how liable men are to be mistaken in their anticipatory judgments; how sometimes all previous expectations are in opposite ways disappointed. I am well aware how much there is needed in those who are called to decide upon such questions, the meekness of wisdom, along with a spirit of fidelity in their trust. Still, it seems to me clear, that this most important matter of *finding* candidates for the ministry of the gospel ought not to be left to fortuitous accident, or the indiscriminate acceptance of all who may offer themselves, or be brought forward by other parties not the most competent to judge in such a case. I have therefore ventured to say that there must, as it seems to me, be more of selection.†

Of the youth of suitable promise, so selected, the whole training, religious and scholastic, must be under a better supervision, directing it specifically to this definite end of the ministry. This supervision and direction must be by those to whom it doth appertain,—Christian parents, and especially *the pastors* of the church. To parents, in the first instance, God has committed the nurture and disposal of the children whom he has given to them; and instructive upon the point before us are the examples that might be copiously adduced from the inspired oracles and from all the annals of the church. But *the Pastors* especially and pre-eminently, are set over this work; and to them it doth appertain. It was to the under-shepherds that

† See Note at the end.

the great Shepherd, when about to depart out of the world, committed the care of his flock. In the criterion of their love to Him, which on that occasion, so affecting and impressive, was established by him who gathereth the lambs in his arms and carrieth them in his bosom, was included specifically the care of the young of his flock, in the solemn and tender charge, *Feed my lambs.* God has made *the Pastor,* under Christ, *the Head of all teaching* in the church; and whatever *helps* he may bring to his assistance, the whole ought to be under his personal supervision and direction.

It is an inquiry not unworthy of some serious thought, How far the abandonment by parents of their children, as to their spiritual nurture, to strangers, and the superceding by other agencies of the direct pastoral care and instruction, by pastors, of the young of their flocks, may account for God's withholding, in the measure he does, from the church the heavenly gift of the anointing of his Spirit upon her sons for the service of the sanctuary. Peradventure, as the Bride of the Lamb marks with anxiety the clouded brow of her Husband and Lord, and says, *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?*—peradventure it might fill her heart with joy and her mouth with praise, were she to open her ear to the response of her Beloved, *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women; go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the Shepherds' tents.*—*Feed thy kids beside* THE SHEPHERDS' *tents.* Peradventure were she to obey the

commandment of her Lord, she might find it to be yet true, I will honor them that honor me. Peradventure were she to draw near to God in the way of his own institutions, this night of her desertion might break and its shadows flee away; and she might find fulfilled to her the promise made to her Royal Head,—*Free will offerings shalt thy people be in the day of thy power; in holy garments of beauty, from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth.* Peradventure she should find what to night she is come into the sanctuary of the Most High to seek;—the heavens would drop at the presence of God; he would pour down a rain of free gifts to strengthen his weary heritage; the Lord, of his goodness providing gospel for the poor, would commit to her sons his word, and great should be the company of them who should publish it, and of whom the rejoicing nations should say, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*‡

3. There must, it seems to me, be *more and better account made,* than has been, by the church, *of the Covenant which God has established with his people and their seed after them.*

(1) In reference to the consecration, according to the will of God, of her sons to the ministry.

I believe that God's purpose of the salvation of the world is destined to be accomplished; not in the loose, and irregular, and disorderly methods now so much in vogue with many who bear the Christian name; but by a return of his people to God in his own sanctuary, and according to the tenor of the Covenant he has given to them.

When the Lord shall create new heavens and a new earth, when he shall create Jerusalem a joy and his people a rejoicing, it shall come into remembrance that, Israel is the Seed of the Blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. So in particular in respect to this question of the ministry. No doubt, God in his sovereignty does often take of the sons of strangers and set them to minister in his holy place; and of these, some have become burning and shining lights. Yet, in this as in other things, the Old Testament, I am disposed to think, is to a greater extent than is generally believed, the type of the New. In the temple which the Lord has pitched, and not man, I am apt to think, it is chiefly of those whom he has made unto himself a holy priesthood,—I mean his own godly people,—that he will take to make priests in his house, to offer up its spiritual sacrifices while the sun and moon shall endure.

(2) But, second, according to the tenor of this Covenant, all the people of God must take hold on the promise of the Covenant; and, with a faith that staggers not through unbelief, plead it with God in prayer unto Him, for this heavenly gift.

In so doing we have abundant encouragement. God, who cannot lie, of old time, has promised to bestow this gift upon his church. Let one instance stand for all.

Jeremiah lived in times of great evil. Israel, unfaithful, adulterous, abandoned Israel, had been delivered, for her sin, into the hands of the pagan Esserhaddon. Her treacherous sister Judah saw; but, instead of being warned, drunk with the cup of her sorceries, gave herself up to wickedness even

more revolting than that of repudiated Israel. The Seer of the Lord foresees the issue. He beholds the Temple of his God burned up with fire; the city of the great King broken down and laid in the dust; and Jerusalem with her children gone into captivity. The fountains of his tears are broken up, and he pours out his soul over the ruin of his people and the people of his God. It was a darker night, brethren, than has often pressed over the Church. But there is hope in God.

Sorrow may lodge for a night in the tabernacles of Jacob, but in the morning cometh joy. The prophet lifts up his weeping eyes upon the long desolation. His vision pierces through the clouds and thick darkness that are round about him, and overspread the whole land of Judah and Israel, beyond the present, far into the ages to come.—Afar off he descries that time when they shall call Jerusalem;—not the Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children; but Jerusalem which is from above, and which is free and the mother of us all;—afar off he descries that time when they shall call *this* Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord; and, as the admiring nations, beholding the approach of the Messenger of Jehovah's covenant, shout, *How beautiful upon the mountains are his feet;*—his prophets ear catches the gracious words proceeding out of his mouth in the promise, *I will give you pastors according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.* Jer. iii: 15.

Faithful is He that hath promised, who also is able to do it. When God's set time to favour Zion

is come, the waking heart of the Bride cries to the daughters of Jerusalem,—*The voice of my Beloved!—Behold!—he comes leaping upon the mountains, hasting forward upon the hills!* To them who wait for the Consolation of Israel and look for Redemption in Jerusalem he comes. For a little while he is straitened, until the baptism wherewith he is to be baptized be accomplished. Then to her anointed sons he gives the great commission; *Go ye;—teach all nations; lo, I am with you even to the end of the world.* The triumphal song of Israel's Psalmist, when he, being a prophet, and fore-seeing these things, did strike boldly his inspired harp in the coronation-anthem of his Royal Son, comes swelling down through a thousand years to the New Testament Church, *Why leap ye, ye high hills? Twenty thousand thousands of angels are the chariots of God. The Lord is among them, as at Sinai!—Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them.* Exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, the crowned Lord of all pours down upon Zion the Pentecostal baptism, that her sons may prophesy. And the great Apostle of the Gentiles leads the chorus of the New Testament Zion, responsive to the prophetic song of the Old; *When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men;—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto*

the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Brethren, what need we more? What remains to us, but that; knowing the will of God; and the time, that it is now high time to awake out of sleep, seeing our salvation is nearer than when we believed; we take hold of his covenant, and with a living faith plead in this matter its promise with the Angel of the Covenant? The Righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend up into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down;) Or who shall descend into the deep? (that is to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But, what saith it? The word is nigh thee; in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is the word which we preach. *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

NOTES.

† *More of selection.* I wish not to be misunderstood. A distinguished pastor, occupying a high post of observation, indicated, a few years ago, in no dubious manner, his opinion, that the power of the pulpit is less in the ministry of the present age than in that of the last. To this opinion, by another authority not less eminent, was opposed an earnest protest and denial. Of course, in such a case we have no disposition to assume the seat of judgment, or to express any opinion. *Non nostrum tantas componere lites.* Perhaps, however, we may speak as a witness of what has fallen under our personal observation, in the course of now near twice seven years that our attention has been by our occupations specially called to this question of the qualifications of candidates for the ministry, and let our testimony be taken for what it is worth. Among the young men who during this period have come under our special notice, we suppose there has been found an average measure of qualifications very similar to that of any equal number elsewhere. Most of those who have gone into the ministry, it is grateful to us to say, are fulfilling acceptably and usefully, some of them with distinction, its duties. If *all* who have from time to time appeared as candidates had found their way into the ministry, perhaps there would not in their case be equal reason of gratulation. If as a witness we may give the result of our observation, it would go to confirm the position that there ought to be more of selection. *Ex omni ligno non fit Mercurius.* As of the poet, so of the prophet, it may be said, *nascitur; non fit.*

‡ I have said that both the selection of candidates for the ministry and the supervision of their whole education, religious and scholastic, ought to be by those to whom it appertains—*the pastors* and *presbyters* of the church. Than this, there is, in the whole range of his duties, none which the thoughtful pastor, or presbyter, regards as one of greater delicacy and difficulty; or for his due performance of which he feels more deeply his responsibility to God and to the

church. It is agreed on all hands, that it is not only the right, but the indispensable duty of the church to obtain, so far as this is possible to men, full satisfaction concerning both the personal piety and the gifts of her candidates. But the inquiry on these points ought to be so conducted as, on the one hand to comport with due fidelity in those on whom it devolves, and the obtaining of what *is really evidence* in the case; and, on the other hand, not to wound the manly and Christian sensibilities, and do serious injury to the character, of a class of her sons, whose character and spiritual interests the church is under obligation to guard with a jealous delicacy and care. It may well be questioned, with what fitness in the principle of the thing, or with what advantage in the results, the sacred office of judging of the qualifications of candidates for the ministry, is transferred from those to whom by Divine appointment it belongs, to school masters, (from the grammar school to the theological seminary,) scattered up and down the country; sitting each one as a secret inquisitor, with his little gage in his hand, upon the gifts and graces of candidates, and noting the results of the inquest in the blank forms which are furnished to him. To say nothing of the practicability or the value of such measurements of "talents," "knowledge," "eloquence," "prudence," and the like, it is not very apparent what is the idea of *the life of God in the soul*, from which has arisen the conception of applying to it such a mechanical mensuration, and indicating its degrees on the scale by an arithmetical notation; so as to pronounce that A is *twice* as pious as B, and C is *half* as pious as D;—E is *seven-tenths* (7-10) as pious as F;—and (by the use of decimals, "if greater accuracy is desired,") G is *three-tenths and a fraction of a fraction*, (say 3 5-10) more pious than H; and so on through the list. These reports, so made up, are returned under the seal of secrecy to the seat of the operations, to be there registered and filed; and we are told that "*questions of importance often turn entirely upon them!*" It is presumed that, whenever the attention of the proper authorities of the church shall be directed to the matter, the appropriate correction will be applied to a procedure which is regarded, by not a few, with disapproval of judgment and revulsion of feeling. So much we have felt bound to say, to engage, if it may be, attention to an evil which really goes to defeat the end aimed at by the church; and out of regard to the feelings and character of those who are subjected to its operation.